

Introduction

In 2015 the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that a substantial percentage of religiously biased hate crimes were against Muslims. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center in just one year the number of hate groups against Muslims dramatically increased from 36 in 2015 to 101 in 2016. The present study explored reasons behind people's negative reactions against Muslims. One way to understand these prejudice attitudes can be explained by Social Identity Theory, which states that people rely on social categories and in-groups in order to feel connected with similar others and maintain positive self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1987). Also, low self-esteem might influence how individuals feel towards Muslims. For example, Allen and Sherman (2011) conducted a study that revealed those with lowered self-esteem showed more prejudice against an out-group compared to an in-group.

Based on past research, I predicted that:

1. People who self-identify as Christian would express greater negative attitudes toward religious out-group members (Muslims) than toward religious in-group members.
2. Self-esteem would predict prejudice responses; individuals who report lower self-esteem would express greater prejudice toward Muslims compared to individuals who report higher self-esteem.

Method

Participants: There was a total of 157 participants with an age range of 18 to 48 ($M = 19.5$, $SD = 2.93$); 73.9% women and 26.1% men; 44.6% White, 38.9% Hispanic, 8.9% Black, 5.1% Asian, 2.6% Other; 82.2% identified as Christian, 17.8% identified as non-Christian; 31 identified as democrats, 32 moderates, 53 republicans, and 41 as unsure.

Procedure: Participants first answered a self-esteem questionnaire (Rosenberg, 1965), then read several scenarios; some described a Muslim individual and others described a Christian individual engaged in a behavior. Following each scenario, participants were asked to answer questions about their perceptions of the individual, which were designed to measure participants' attitudes (prejudice) toward the individual who was described as a religious in-group or a religious out-group member.

Participants then answered measures related to in-group bias. All measures were scaled from 1 to 7.

- Prejudice Toward Immigrants (Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999)
- Cultural Mistrust Inventory (Terrell & Terrell, 1981)
- Islamophobia Scale (Sherman, et al., 2013)
- Islamoprejudice Scale (Imhoff & Recker, 2012)
- General National Pride Scale (Smith & Kim, 2006)
- Nationalism and Patriotism Scale (De Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003)
- Religiosity scale (Hoge, 1972)
- Religion as Quest scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991)

Finally, participants were asked to self-identify as Christian or non-Christian, as well as to indicate their political party.

Results

To test the first hypothesis, I conducted independent samples t-tests to compare responses between Christians and non-Christians.

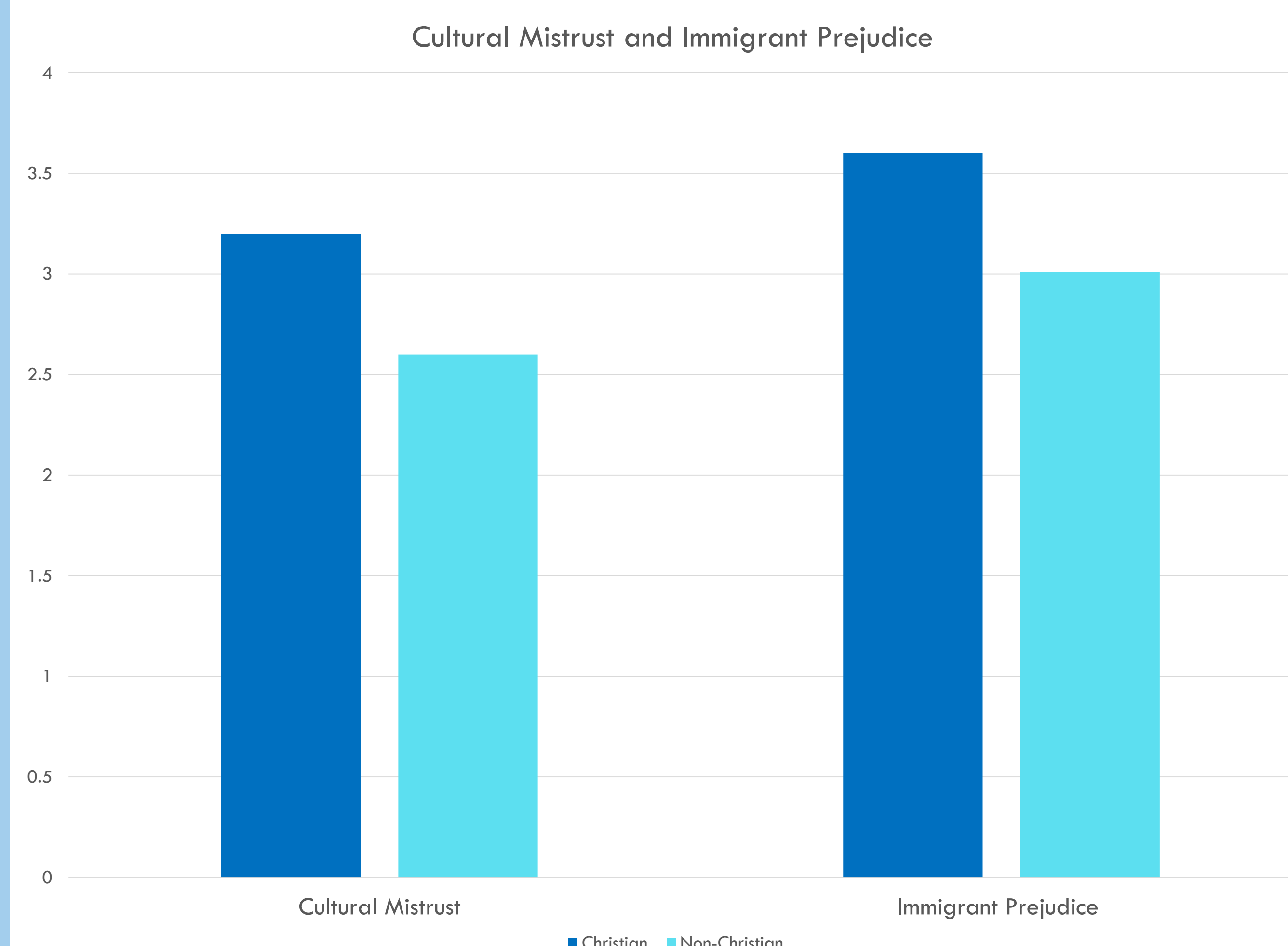
As predicted, scenario results revealed a significant difference in perceptions between Christian and non-Christian participants. When the individual in the scenario was engaged in religious Christian behavior (e.g., praying to Christ), those who identified as Christians reported feeling more favorably toward them ($M = 6.74$, $SD = .94$) than those who identified as non-Christian ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 1.17$); $t(77) = .89$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.14$.

However, when the individual was engaged in religious Muslim behavior (e.g., praying to Allah), those who identified as Christian reported feeling less favorable toward the individual ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.16$) than those who self-identified as non-Christian ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.22$); $t(76) = .59$, $p = .04$, $d = .65$.

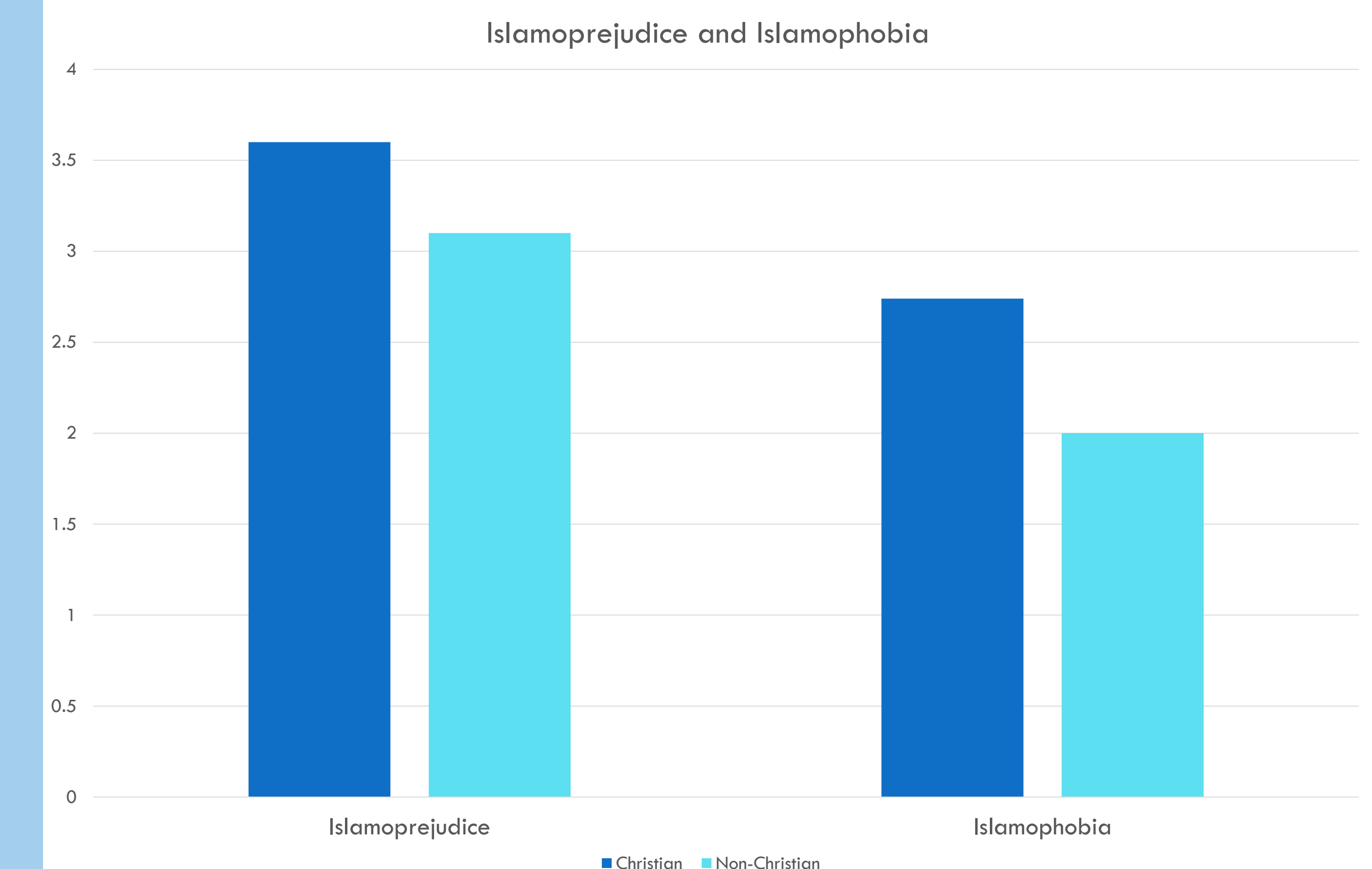
To test my second hypothesis that self-esteem would predict Islamoprejudice, I conducted a simple linear regression using self-esteem as the predictor variable and Islamoprejudice as the dependent variable. Contrary to the hypothesis, self-esteem was not a predictor, $p > .2$.

I also explored the responses of self-identified Christians and non-Christians to the measures related to in-group biases.

Christians reported feeling more cultural mistrust than Non-Christians, $t(155) = 3.02$, $p = .003$; more immigrant prejudice than non-Christians, $t(155) = 3.04$, $p = .003$; higher levels of Islamoprejudice than non-Christians, $t(155) = 2.72$, $p = .007$; and higher levels of Islamophobia than Non-Christians; $t(155) = 3.04$, $p = .003$.



Results (Cont.)



Linear regressions also revealed that religiosity significantly predicted Islamoprejudice, $F(1, 155) = 14.28$, $p < .001$, R^2 of .078; $\beta = .29$, $p < .001$, as well as significantly predicting Islamophobia, $F(1, 155) = 16.65$, $p < .001$, R^2 of .092, $\beta = .303$, $p = .001$.

Additionally, self-esteem was a significant predictor of National Pride, such that those who reported lower self-esteem, reported greater national pride, $\beta = -.16$, $F(1, 155) = 4.28$, $p = .04$, $R^2 = .03$. Additionally, self-esteem was a significant predictor of National Patriotism, such that those who reported lower self-esteem, reported greater national patriotism, $\beta = -.27$, $F(1, 155) = 12.05$, $p = .001$, $R^2 = .07$.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide evidence to support the prediction that people who self-identify as Christian feel more negative attitudes toward Muslims (out-group members) than other Christians (in-group members); however, results provided no evidence to support the prediction that low self-esteem contributes to anti-Muslim prejudice. Therefore, the findings suggest that in-group bias is the driving force behind people's negative attitudes toward Muslims and that self-esteem does not have a significant role.

This idea is supported by the results of the questionnaires that measured in-group bias, which indicated more negative attitudes toward outgroup members. The knowledge gained from this study is important because it allows us to further understand why negative prejudice exists towards those of the Islamic faith, and hopefully help decrease anti-Muslim prejudice.